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ABSTRACT

National surveys conducted by the Institute for Social Research indicate that there has been a steady decline in the last decade in the proportion of white people who see themselves as living in an all white world. Along with the change in perceptions, the traditional white pattern of white attitudes toward blacks also exhibits change, with young people, college graduates, and white people living in metropolitan areas denoting more positive attitudes than those in the South. There are two issues regarding which white attitudes have not become more positive: that of governmental intervention with respect to equal job opportunities and school integration. Black people interviewed also see the racial situation as changing. Black attitudes toward issues of segregation and civil rights are predictably different from those of whites, with very few black people favoring strict segregation of the races at any point during this 10 year period. Black perceptions of changes in race relations differ substantially from those of whites. In general, the data show that during the mid-1960's black people in this country had a strong feeling of change in conventional racial patterns, expressed both in their perception of increased contact with white people and in their sense of real change in their situation. The sense of change for the better has diminished during the seventies. (Author/AM)

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Institute for Social Research
July 1975

Racial Trends: 1964-1974

There has been a steady decline in the last 10 years in the proportion of white people in this country who see themselves living in an all white world.

National surveys conducted by the Institute for Social Research between 1964 and 1974 show a diminishing number of white respondents who say their local schools are all white, the people they work with are all white, the people where they shop are all white, their neighborhoods are all white, or that their friends are all white. As Table 1 demonstrates, the greatest change during this period was in the proportion of white people who said their local grade school was all white, which declined from 59 percent in 1964 to 26 percent in 1974.

This shift in white perceptions of contact with black people went on in all sections of the country. The greatest change was in the southern states where, in 1974, white people were less likely than people in other areas of the country to describe their schools, working places, and shopping places as all white. The smallest change is reported by white people in the North Central states, who reported one of the strongest patterns of segregation in 1964 and maintained that position in 1974, particularly in their schools and neighborhoods.

Older white people are consistently less likely than younger people to see themselves in contact with black people, especially as friends, but over the 10-year period their perceptions of the various areas of their lives as all white also declined, like those of all of the other

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TABLE 1

Proportion of White Samples Describing Their Situation as All White

Is the neighborhood you now live in all white, mostly white, about half and half, mostly black or all black?	1964	1968	1970	1972	1974
	80	75	73	67	61
Is the grade school nearest you . . .	59	36	36	36	26
Is the high school nearest you . . .	43	27	22	24	16
Are the people where you work . . .	53	43	49	43	39
Are the people where you shop and trade . . .	39	25	27	22	15
Are your friends . . .	81	70	66	57	53

age groups. Perceived contact with black people is clearly associated with extent of formal education, white people with relatively little schooling being the most likely to describe their neighborhoods, their schools, their jobs, their shopping places, and their friends as all white. They held this position in 1964 and although their perceptions shifted significantly during the following 10 years they still held this position in 1974. White college graduates were the most likely to report cross-racial contact in 1964 and remained so in 1974.

White people living in the metropolitan centers were considerably less likely to see themselves in an all white situation than did those living elsewhere. These proportions declined for both groups over the 10-year period although there appears to have been a small reversal of this trend in the metropolitan centers in 1974, where a slighter larger number of white people described their neighborhoods, grammar schools, and friends as all white than had done so in the 1972 survey.

During this 10-year period, as an increasing number of white people saw themselves in contact with blacks, the traditional white pattern of white attitudes toward blacks also changed. The proportion of whites who declared themselves in favor of "strict segregation" declined during this decade from approximately a quarter to a tenth. The number who felt the government should protect the right of black people to equal accommodations in public places rose from 56 percent to 75 percent. The proportion who agreed that black people should have the right to move into any neighborhood they could afford increased from 65 percent to 87 percent. Just as with the changing perceptions of contact with black people, these attitudes changed throughout the population. The South, which had been most negative in 1964, was still the most negative region in 1974 although the changes in these attitudes were greater in the South than in any of the other regions and as a result the regional differences were smaller at the end of this decade than they had been at the beginning. Young people and college graduates were generally more favorable in their attitudes than older and less educated people throughout this period and became more favorable as the decade passed. White people living in metropolitan centers were clearly more positive than people living in the rest of the country at the beginning of this period but by 1974 both groups were more positive than they had been earlier and the difference between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan people had considerably narrowed.

The Institute surveys show that there are two issues regarding which white attitudes have not become more positive. When asked in 1964 whether they felt the federal government should "see to it that black

people get fair treatment in jobs" slightly less than half of these respondents with opinions on the subject agreed that it should and this proportion remained almost the same in 1974. On the subject of school integration, somewhat fewer than half of the white respondents in the 1964 survey who had an opinion on the subject agreed that "the government in Washington should see to it that white and black children go to the same schools." These proportions increased in 1970 so that a small majority of those with opinions favored this governmental action. Since 1970, however, support of this policy has declined among white people and in 1974 stood at the lowest point during the 10-year period, slightly more than one white person in three supporting this position.

Support for these policies of governmental intervention has been consistently higher among younger people, those with college education, and those living in the metropolitan centers but the trends in their attitudes are the same as those of the rest of the population, little change in attitudes toward fair treatment for blacks in employment and a decline in support of enforced school integration. Southern whites showed the greatest oppostion to these policies in 1964 and continued to do so throughout the 10-year period.

There are numerous indications in the surveys that white people increasingly saw relations between the races improving during the 1964-1974 period. There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of the white population who say there has been "a lot of real change in the position of black people in the past few years." There has been a corresponding decrease in the proportion of white people who believe that "civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast," moving from a

large majority in 1964 (68 percent) to a minority in 1974 (40 percent). The proportion of whites who felt that most of the actions taken by blacks in pursuit of their rights had been violent dropped from a high of 73 percent in 1968 to 32 percent in 1974. The proportion who thought that the actions black people had taken had "helped their cause" increased from a fifth in 1964 to a half 10 years later. The proportion who estimated that "all" or "most" of the white people in their area were "in favor of strict segregation of the races" dropped from 58 percent in 1964 to 42 percent in 1974.

A new series of questions added to the surveys in 1970 give additional evidence of white perceptions of improving relations between the races. The proportion of white respondents who thought that "only a few white people in their area disliked black people" increased from 44 percent to 52 percent between 1972 and 1974. A similar but smaller change appeared in their perceptions of the number of black people who dislike whites. There was an increase between 1972 and 1974 in the proportion of white people who thought "most white people want to see black people get a better break," rather than not caring or wanting to "keep them down," changing from 27 percent to 35 percent. When asked directly whether they thought "relations between white and black people have been getting better, getting worse, or staying pretty much the same," the proportion of white people who said "getting better" increased from 48 percent in 1972 to 58 percent in 1974, in both cases a much larger proportion than those who thought relations were getting worse. During this same two-year period there was a drop in the number of white respondents who said they would "personally prefer to live in a neighborhood

with all white people" from 44 percent, to 38 percent, with an accompanying increase in the proportion who would prefer a "mostly white" neighborhood from 23 percent to 33 percent.

The black people interviewed in these surveys also saw the racial situation as changing during the 1964-1974 period. In some respects their perceptions of change paralleled those of whites. Like white people, they reported more cross-racial contact at the end of the decade than they had at the beginning, although the pattern of change over time was somewhat different. There was a sharp drop in the number of black people describing their neighborhoods, their local schools, and their friends as all black during the 1960's and no consistent change in the years thereafter. The proportion of black respondents reporting working in an all black or mostly black situation declined moderately throughout this period, reaching a low of about one person in seven in 1974. The proportion who described the places they shopped as all black or mostly black did not change significantly over the 10-year period although the number of black people who reported shopping in all white or mostly white establishments declined steadily. In general, the increases in perceived contact with white people reported by blacks reflect the same social changes which are seen in the reports of white people.

The surveys make clear that throughout this 10-year period white people have seen themselves as more isolated from blacks than black people have from whites. Even at the end of this period half of the white respondents of these surveys reported that they had no black friends; fewer than half this many black people could not claim a single white friend. Starting from higher levels of isolation at the beginning

of the decade, white people were more likely to have seen change from a totally segregated situation than black people were.

Black attitudes toward issues of segregation and civil rights are predictably different from those of whites. Very few black people favored "strict segregation" of the races at any point during this 10-year period. Nor did they question the right of black people to equal access to public accommodations or the right to live any place they could afford. Very large majorities of black people felt that the federal government should protect their right to fair treatment in employment. Majorities of black people have also supported federal intervention into the integration of schools, although in 1974 the level of their support had declined somewhat from earlier levels.

Black perceptions of changes in race relations in this country differ substantially from those of whites. In 1964 a majority of black respondents in the Institute for Social Research survey agreed that there had been "a lot of real change in the position of black people in the past few years" but in 1974 this proportion had declined to less than half. In contrast to white perceptions no more than 10 percent of black people felt that civil rights leaders were "pushing too fast" at any time during the 1964-74 period, whereas about a third believed they were moving too slowly. No more than a minority of blacks (around a quarter) ever have felt that most black actions have been violent and this proportion has remained relatively constant. Large majorities, near four out of five, have felt throughout this period their cause has been helped by the civil rights actions black people were taking. The proportion who believed all or most white people favored "strict segregation" was never as high as that reported by whites themselves and it tended to decline over the 1964-74 period.

The upward shift in white perceptions of race relations between 1972 and 1974 does not appear in the interviews with black people. There has not been an increase in their number who believe "most white people want to see black people get a better break": there has in fact been a small increase in those who say white people "don't care one way or another." There has been no change in the proportion who think "only a few white people dislike black people" or in the number who believe "only a few black people dislike whites." Something over half of the black respondents felt "relations between white and black people have been getting better" and this proportion did not change over the two-year period. Neither did the very small proportion (under 10 percent) who thought they were getting worse.

The black samples in the ISR's national surveys are too small to permit the comparison of the views of blacks in different regions of the country or at different age and educational levels. In general the 10-year data show that during the mid-nineteen sixties black people in this country had a strong feeling of change in conventional racial patterns, expressed both in their perception of increased contact with white people and in their sense of "real change" in their situation. As the sixties ended, black perceptions appear to have struck a plateau from which they did not change during the 1970's. The ISR surveys do not reveal any general deterioration in black attitudes toward whites; there has, for example, been no increase in the small proportion of black people who believe "black people should not have anything to do with whites if they can help it." But the sense of change for the better which seemed strong during the sixties appeared to have diminished during the seventies.